

## *A Beautiful Tradition: Adaptation and Ingenuity in a Century of Plateau Women's Art*

## ANSWER KEY High School

- Where is the Plateau region located? What is its main geographical feature south of the Canadian border? What other tribal regions are located to the west, north, east and south of the Plateau region?
  - The Plateau region is located between the Rocky Mountains on the east and the Cascade Mountains on the west. To the south is the Great Basin and to the north is the sub-arctic region. The main feature of the Plateau region in the U.S. is the Columbia River.*
- Which Montana tribes are Plateau tribes? *Salish, Pend d'Oreille (Kalispel), Kootenai.*
- List two reasons why Plateau tribes regularly traveled east of the Rockies. Be specific. *To hunt bison and to trade with Plains tribes.*
- What are three general cultural differences between the tribes of the Plateau and those of the Plains?
  - Plateau tribes were fishing cultures** who also hunted. Plains tribes were hunters.*
  - Plateau tribes were more egalitarian** between men and women—women could have leadership roles, fight in wars, and be spiritual leaders just as men could.*
  - Plateau tribes did not have as much competition for resources between tribes** because they had more food resources in their environment, so they tended to be more at peace with each other. Warfare and raiding were central to cultures of Plains tribes.*
  - Plateau villages were semi-permanent according to seasons** and were reused earthen lodges along rivers in fishing areas. Plain tribes were more mobile because they depended on bison hunting. (Salish and Kootenai also used tipis.)*
- What are two cultural similarities between Plateau and Plains tribes?
  - Some Plateau tribes, such as the Salish and Kootenai, had yearly bison hunts; bison were the mainstay of Plains tribes' economies and central to their cultures.*
  - Horses were a significant part of some Plateau tribes' way of life, as they were for the Plains tribes; the Nez Perce and Cayuse, for example, were two tribes who bred and raised horses.*
- List at least three of the art forms common among Plateau tribes *before* they acquired beads:
  - Coiled baskets***
  - Carving** (wood, bighorn sheep horns, stone)*
  - Twined bags and baskets** (like cornhusk bags)*
  - Painting and dyeing.***
- Plateau tribes use many different materials from their environment for decorative and artistic expression. List four different media used in traditional Plateau art: *rawhide; buckskin/tanned hides; plant fibers like corn husks, Indian hemp, cattail, cedar bark; sheep horns, stone, wood.*
- List three media used to *decorate* Plateau arts before Europeans and Euro-Americans came to the region: *plant dyes and clay pigments (to paint); shells; bones; plant fibers (beargrass, cedar bark, dyed corn husk, etc.)*
- Where did glass beads come from? How and when did Plateau tribes acquire them?
  - Intertribal trade routes brought European glass beads to the Plateau as early as the late 1600s, but only rarely. Canadian and American fur traders brought beads to the Plateau via their Métis, Cree and Chippewa employees, who were the primary source for glass beads. Glass beads came to the Plateau as a regular trade item as early as 1820.*

10. Beadwork styles from which other tribes/peoples influenced most of the Plateau tribes before 1880? Why?
- *Tribes who moved west during the fur trade era—Cree, Chippewa and the Métis—influenced early Plateau beadwork style and beading techniques. These tribes and mixed-heritage people had access to European beads since around 1600 and were often the intermediaries in trade. Additionally, the Métis of Cree descent established strong trade alliances with the Kootenai in the 1700s.*
11. Beads quickly became very popular in Plateau art. List four reasons why:
- *Beads did not have to be harvested or soaked prior to use. Plant fibers did.*
  - *Beads were available in many colors; they did not have to be dyed like plant fibers did.*
  - *Beads made curvilinear designs possible.*
  - *Beads were a symbol of trade, well-being and affluence.*
  - *Beads could be acquired at any time of year and used at any time of year.*
  - *Beads were easy to use and beautiful to look at.*
12. The materials and decorative media used in traditional Plateau arts reveal one way in which Plateau people utilized resources in their environment. How did the establishment of the reservations in the 1850s and the lumping of many tribes together affect Plateau art?
- *When the reservations were established on the Plateau, multiple tribes were put together on each reservation. Inter-marriage between people of different tribes increased, as did the influence of each tribe on the others. Also, because tribes were taken off of their traditional territories, the resources formerly available to them were often no longer available, so they became more reliant on new sources of resources, such as trading posts and inter-tribal networks.*
13. What design style is used in the decorations on twined bags and coiled baskets of Plateau tribes? *Geometric.*  
What design style is often used on Plateau beaded bags? *Realistic or representational.*
14. What did beads allow the artist to do that could not easily be done by twining or coiling? How did this ability change the composition and style of Plateau designs?
- *Beads enabled artists to create curvilinear shapes instead of rectilinear ones. This ability changed Plateau art by making it possible for realistic, natural shapes. Plateau bead-workers were able to develop highly realistic compositions of identifiable plants and animals, in addition to designs featuring people, scenery, and cultural emblems.*
15. What is a **motif**? *A motif is the main theme or idea in a design or pattern. What motifs are often used on twined Plateau-style bags, such as cornhusk bags? Common motifs in Plateau beaded bags are horses, flowers and birds. Also (later) scenes of Indian life.*
16. What are four common motifs on beaded Plateau bags between 1880 and the 1940s? How are they similar or different to those decorating cornhusk bags?
- *Flowers, horses, birds, people. (Also: American flag, animals like deer and elk, scenery.)*
  - *Cornhusk bags also used the motifs of flowers, but these were geometric and abstract, and have been also identified as stars. Animals and occasionally people were also used on twined bags, but again, they were rectilinear and abstract in style. The beaded motifs were identifiable and realistic in contrast, and between 1880 and the 1940s, many American cultural symbols, like the flag and flower bouquets, were added to the repertoire of Plateau artists.*
17. List three of the major non-Indian influences on Plateau beadwork between 1880 and 1940. What do these events tell us about how American Indians were participating in American society in these decades?
- **Boarding schools:** *Indian children were separated from their families and prevented from learning indigenous knowledge by indigenous means. Girls, for example, were taught domestic chores and arts, such as embroidery and needle work, which in turn influenced their sense of artistic style and composition as they were exposed to the flowery, romantic aesthetics of the Victorian era. At this time, Indian children also learned to be more culturally like their white American counterparts.*

- **Reservation life:** *The reservation system changed the way tribal economies functioned, decreasing the self-reliance of tribes and their interaction with the natural environment. Tribal people became increasingly dependent on the American economic system and participated in it in new ways.*
  - **World War I:** *Although they were not, as a category, considered American citizens, indigenous people often identified themselves as such or saw that they could participate in world affairs as Americans, thus large numbers of Native men joined the military in World War I (and many more Native men and women did in World War II). This did not mean that they gave up their tribal heritage, but that many Indians saw themselves and both Americans and Indians.*
18. What is the difference in **function** between traditional cornhusk bags and later beaded flat bags of the Plateau region?
- **Cornhusk bags** (twined bags in general) were used for **harvesting and storing plant foods**, like roots.
  - **Beaded bags**, which were often smaller, were used as part of **ceremonial regalia**, to carry personal items (like purses) and were handed down as **heirlooms**. Beaded bags were also **sold to collectors** (Euro-Americans) for cash.
19. Define or describe the following terms as applied to various beading **techniques** and/or design **styles** in beadwork or twined Plateau bags:
- **Contour beading:** *Contour beading is when the lines of beads used in the background conform to the shape of the image in the foreground (the design motif). This style of beading makes the background appear to have motion or “waves” in it.*
  - **Imbrication:** *Imbrication is also known as “false embroidery.” It looks like embroidery, but the design is actually woven into the structure of the basket or bag. It is used to decorate twined and coiled baskets and bags.*
  - **Curvilinear:** *Describes something that is characterized by or comprised of curved lines.*
20. Describe one of the Plateau bags you like best. In your description, remember to discuss the bag’s **style, function, and composition** (media used, design style, motif, colors, etc.). Also, mention which of the materials/media are indigenous and which were introduced from outside of this continent. Consider in your evaluation the time period in which this bag was made and the resources the maker might have had available.
- **See individual responses.** *Look for descriptions of bag type, media, composition, design type, style, techniques, motif, colors, in addition to each student’s personal assessment of the item.*
21. In what ways does the utilization of both new and traditional materials by women artists of the Plateau demonstrate continuity of cultural identity? How and why is art part of identity?
- *Before the availability of beads, Plateau cultures placed a high value on beauty and the perfection of artistic skills. Plateau women traditionally utilized the resources available to them within their native regions and those they acquired from intertribal trade. Their traditional arts required much time and dedication to learn and to do well. When beads became available, Plateau women recognized them as yet another artistic resource and were able to continue their own traditional aesthetics in addition to developing new styles and motifs in response to the events of their time. The passing on of artistic skills, techniques, compositions and motifs are also an element of cultural continuity, even when the medium changes.*
  - *Art is a significant part of identity in that it represents certain cultural characteristics and values. In addition, art reflects social, political, and economic conditions. Art is one way of maintaining cultural customs and values through time and of adapting to cultural changes as well. Art is also a part of personal identity in that through art a person is able to demonstrate cultural belonging and develop an identity which is recognized within one’s own culture as that of an artist.*